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OBSERVATIONS OF ADOLESCENTS WITH CHRONIC DISORDERS IN THE SURGERY:
BYSTANDERS OR MAIN CHARACTERS?

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Introduction

Communication with adolescents with chronic disorders in ambulatory pediatric care is sometimes frustrating, as adolescents often do not take the lead in conversations. In contrast, modern adolescents seem to be highly competent communicators with their peers.

Aim and material

We examined competencies of adolescents with chronic disorders as demonstrated in the pediatric outpatients department. Six nursing specialists and four researchers observed 39 consultations of 30 adolescents (12-22 years) with pediatricians, nurses and a dietician at various outpatients’ clinics at Erasmus MC-Sophia. Conversations were recorded and the observers filled in structured forms rating the adolescents’ competencies. Adolescents were briefly interviewed before and after consultations. Data analysis was performed with ATLAS-ti and SPSS.

Results

Adolescents, particularly those under 16, expect the caregiver to take the lead during consultations. They answer questions, but rarely ask them. Most adolescents are accompanied by their parents whose role is important: they report, clarify, fill in and sometimes dominate the conversation. Adolescents from 12-15 years old tend “to let the parents do the driving”. Caregivers try to redirect the conversation towards adolescents. Adolescents directly involved in self-management (such as in diabetes) and those visiting the outpatients department without parents are more communicative and display more competencies.

Conclusions

Often, adolescents remain passive during consultations. This is enhanced by the fixed structure of medical interviewing and the presence of parents. As parents support them, adolescents are not stimulated to represent themselves. Caregivers could change this by making consultations more patient-directed and by influencing the presence of parents.